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Abstract: This paper takes four frameworks for understanding linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson, Watts, Terkourafi, Hall) and tests each on the same corpus to see whether they yield results that are useful and/or in keeping with the other information we have about the material. The corpus used consists of 661 polite requests made in letters by a single Roman author, Cicero. The results demonstrate first that politeness theories are helpful as explanatory tools even in dealing with very well-known material, and second that no one theory is best: different theories are more and less useful in answering different questions about the data. It is therefore suggested that the use of multiple frameworks will provide the best understanding of the data.

Keywords: politeness, 'please', Latin, Cicero, *rogo*, *oro*

1 Politeness theories

Modern analysis of linguistic politeness began nearly forty years ago when Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) produced a theory claiming to provide a unified, universally valid model for the underlying mechanisms of politeness. Yet for most of that period their theory has been the subject of relentless criticism. The criticism has been both comprehensive and effective, not only attacking the theory from every conceivable angle but also disproving it convincingly from multiple angles. Despite all this, Brown and Levinson's theory remains in

Note: Much of the material in this chapter has also been published, aimed at a different type of audience, in my "The rules of politeness and Latin request formulae", in P. Probert and A. Willi (eds), *Laws and Rules in Indo-European* (Oxford University Press 2012), pp. 313–328. I am grateful to Philomen Probert for help and encouragement with this project and to Marina Terkourafi for fruitful discussions, careful critiques, and patient corrections of my misrepresentations of her theory. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

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common use, because it has a key benefit to users that none of its competitors can offer: a simple template that can (it is claimed) be used to analyze the politeness system of any language. The ease with which this template can be deployed, even for languages of which the researcher has limited knowledge and for which only small amounts of data are being used, makes it highly attractive to researchers (cf., for example, Lloyd 2006 and Jucker 2012).

The question, of course, is whether application of this template produces genuinely useful results: does it result in insights that we would not otherwise have, and are those insights valid? And how does the usefulness of these insights compare with those achieved by applying other, more recent models of linguistic politeness (e.g., the eight others examined by Eelen in 2001 or the numerous further models mentioned by Culpeper in 2011)? What about the ease with which the template is applicable: in reality, how much harder are other theories to use?

In order to examine these questions I have chosen three recent theories and tested them and Brown and Levinson's original theory on a large set of very well-understood data. There are two goals, of which the first is to establish whether *any* politeness theory can be useful as a way to understand texts that have already been extensively studied from other angles. Most work on politeness aims to understand politeness itself, not the corpus studied, but in order to have a broader utility politeness theory should be able to shed light on utterances and texts containing politeness. Work on contemporary usage often employs data collected specifically for that study; such material is easy to illuminate as it has never been studied before. Work on historical usage is more likely to demonstrate the utility of politeness theory in understanding material that has already been studied, and indeed some excellent work has now been done on historical politeness (see, for example, Culpeper and Kádár 2010 and Bax and Kádár 2012). But even the historical studies often make use of material that has previously received only a relatively small amount of linguistic attention; it is not surprising when a study reveals new insights into such texts. So the question addressed here is whether material that has already been very thoroughly studied can benefit from the application of politeness theories. Cicero's letters are an ideal corpus from that perspective, since they have already been so exhaustively studied (see below) that it is inherently unlikely that any more insights could be extracted by linguistic study.

Our second goal is to find out how the different theories compare to one another in the quality of the results produced and the amount of effort needed to get those results. The three theories were chosen on the grounds that each has a claim to be the most useful theory in this context: they are Watts's, which has received more widespread attention than most of the other post-Brown-

and-Levinson theories and might *a priori* therefore be expected to be the best; Hall's, which was derived specifically for use with Latin and ought for that reason to be the most helpful; and Terkourafi's, which I have found to be particularly helpful in analysis of ancient Greek (cf. Dickey 2016) and which might therefore be expected to be helpful for Latin.

1.1 Brown and Levinson

This theory holds that utterances become polite by fulfilling the addressee's social needs. Brown and Levinson (1987) hold that there are two main types of such needs, each of which is addressed by a different type of politeness; these two types are called positive and negative politeness. The former consists of words and other behaviours that address an interlocutor's need for people to be nice to him/her, for example by showing affection for, interest in, approval of, or solidarity with the interlocutor; negative politeness by contrast addresses an interlocutor's need not to be pestered or interfered with, for example by phrasing a request indirectly in order to make it easy to refuse, showing deference to the interlocutor's status, or apologizing. The theory also claims that choice between these two types of politeness is determined by the power differential between speaker and addressee, the amount of intimacy between them,[1] and the magnitude of the issue that gives rise to the need for politeness in the first place. Negative politeness is used when there is greater distance between speaker and addressee, when the addressee has a significant amount of power over the speaker, and/or when the issue at hand is of considerable magnitude; positive politeness is used when there is greater intimacy between the parties, when the speaker is equal or superior to the addressee in power and status, and/or when the issue at hand is minor (Brown and Levinson 1987: 71–84). Thus someone who makes a request with "Do you suppose you could possibly find a few minutes to do this for me?" is talking to someone distant and/or a superior, and/or is making a major request; on the other hand someone who says "Mike, I'm sure you'll do this for me – thank you so much!" is talking to an intimate and/or inferior, and/or is making a minor request.

These conclusions seem intuitively right to English speakers, and because Brown and Levinson looked not only at English but also at two unrelated languages in which they found similar patterns, they claimed universality for their

1 Brown and Levinson (1987: 76–77) phrased this as "the degree of similarity/difference between S[peaker] and H[earer] based on frequency of interaction and kinds of material or non-material goods exchanged."

theory. Because of this universality and because the key distinctions typically rely on the lexical and semantic meanings of the phrases used, Brown and Levinson's model has great predictive power: when presented with a literal translation of an isolated utterance in a language about which one knows nothing, one ought in theory to be able to tell whether it is polite – and, if so, why. (Brown and Levinson did not explicitly claim such predictive power and might not have wanted to endorse the strong formulation presented here – they would have said, quite fairly, that of course there are always exceptions – but it is implied by their discussion and their claim of universality for their rules, and it is often assumed by those who apply their theory.) Moreover, with this theory any utterance that can be identified as positively or negatively polite supposedly tells a researcher something about the relationship of the speaker to the addressee and/or about the weighting of the request (or other politeness-requiring act) in their culture.

A piece of this length does not have space for a detailed account of the objections that have been raised to Brown and Levinson's theory (for this, see Eelen 2001; Watts 2003: 85–116; Culpeper 2011: 404–413), but a brief summary will be useful. Much of the opposition has attacked the theory's reliance, as reflected in the terminology with which Brown and Levinson originally proposed it, on certain other theories that have since been challenged or discredited. However, as I have just demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the theory can be restated without any technical terminology apart from "positive politeness" and "negative politeness", which were invented by Brown and Levinson themselves, and it still seems intuitively correct when so stated. (Admittedly these terms were not created *ex nihilo* – they are closely linked to the concepts of positive and negative face – but they can stand on their own, so acceptance or rejection of their antecedents cannot in itself be relevant to the validity of Brown and Levinson's theory.) Since the primary argument in favour of the theory has always been this appearance of obvious rightness, it cannot be disproven by attacking any theoretical basis that can be removed without changing that appearance (*pace* Arundale 2008).

More serious challenges arise from the existence of cultures in which the vast majority of politeness falls into one or the other of Brown and Levinson's two categories (regardless of variation in distance, power, and magnitude of the politeness-requiring act). Brown and Levinson were themselves aware of this problem and explained the existence of such "positive politeness cultures" and "negative politeness cultures" by suggesting that in such cultures one of their key variables could be permanently set at one end of its range. Thus a positive politeness culture could result from a cultural inclination to consider all requests minor, or to consider all interpersonal distance small (Brown and

Levinson 1987: 242–253). But researchers in these cultures have not on the whole been convinced by this argument, and in practical terms Brown and Levinson's theory is not very useful for studying politeness in such languages. Nevertheless, these problems only challenge the theory's universality and do not affect its usefulness for those cultures to which it does seem to apply: a framework that is not universal may nevertheless be genuinely applicable to a large number of different cultures.

There is also the difficulty that Brown and Levinson never really attempted to prove, in any methodologically rigorous fashion, the connection between either type of politeness and the factors on which they claim it depends; they provided plenty of examples (a number of them invented), but rather than taking a corpus and showing that the negative-politeness elements in it were consistently associated with certain factors and the positive-politeness elements consistently associated with other factors, they left the fact that the association seems intuitively obvious (to English speakers) to speak for itself. Subsequent attempts to test Brown and Levinson's theory against actual real-life data have not on the whole upheld their views. For example, Terkourafi (2002, cf. 2004) has shown that in pairs of linguistic strategies that ought to be equivalent according to Brown and Levinson one may be marked and the other unmarked, making them pragmatically very different from one another.

Lastly, the theory's predictive power is reduced by the existence of utterances containing both positive and negative politeness strategies, as "Darling, could you lend me that book?", which combines a positive politeness strategy in the affectionate address with a negative politeness strategy in the indirect phrasing of the request as a question. In fact the frequency of this combination makes it very difficult to apply a distinction between positive and negative politeness to English requests, and thus to use the predictive powers of Brown and Levinson's theory, even in English. Brown and Levinson did discuss this issue (1987: 19–20, 230–233), but that does not remove it as an obstacle to using their theory in a predictive fashion.

Particularly problematic in this respect is the most common and fundamental of English polite request formulae, "please". Though Brown and Levinson did not explicitly so classify it, "please" is often taken to be a marker of negative politeness, since it is a shortened form of "may it please you" or "if you please", phrases that acknowledge the recipient's right not to comply with the request. Often English "please" is indeed used in ways that match this basic meaning: for example in "Please pass the salt" the word "please" turns the impolite command "Pass the salt" into a polite request.

But in some other contexts "please" has a different function. A request to pass the salt could be phrased with simply "Salt, please!"; here "please" turns

the otherwise opaque utterance "Salt" into a request. And a child who wants an ice-cream cone might say "Please, please, please, Mummy, *please* gimme ice cream, please, please!"; in this request "please" makes it harder, not easier, for the mother to refuse the child's demands (cf. Leech 2014: 161–162). Terms with such a request-intensifying function are often described as "urgent", and urgency in this sense is often considered not to be polite at all; in fact it is essentially the opposite of negative politeness (see Risselada 1993: 254–255, who makes this point about Latin).

What all this means is that the term "please" cannot be consistently classified as a marker of negative politeness: it can indeed be such a marker, but it can also have other functions, including one that is diametrically opposed to negative politeness. This example demonstrates that politeness usage cannot always be safely predicted from a term's lexical or etymological meaning.

Testing Brown and Levinson's theory is complicated by the fact that subsequent researchers have interpreted and elaborated the theory in different ways according to their own needs and those of the languages they were studying; this problem is compounded by the issue that Brown and Levinson themselves did not express their ideas as clearly as they might have done. Particularly relevant here is an uncertainty about the extent to which reliance on Brown and Levinson entitles one to ignore the context in which an utterance is produced: on the one hand they did not make such a claim, but on the other hand their use of some contextless examples implies it. Many subsequent researchers have used the theory without regard for context or for utterances that have no context, but by no means all applications of Brown and Levinson fall into this category. For the purpose of this paper the "contextless" interpretation of Brown and Levinson will be used, but it is not claimed that this interpretation necessarily goes back to Brown and Levinson themselves.

1.2 Terkourafi

Terkourafi (e.g., 2002, 2005, 2008, forthcoming) bases politeness on frequency of usage rather than lexical meaning and argues in essence that what is frequent in a given situation is polite in that situation. (This type of politeness is unmarked politeness; Terkourafi's theory also allows for marked (unusual) politeness but declines to provide predictive rules for the specific forms it may take.) Many situations in which interpersonal interaction occurs are common and frequently repeated; in these situations there is an expected sequence of formulaic politeness, and people who deviate from the expected formulae, *even in a direction that might seem to an outside observer more polite than the expect-*

ed formulae, may be perceived as behaving impolitely. For example in a community where shopkeepers normally ask for payment with a simple statement of the amount owed (e.g., "That'll be twelve pound forty-five, then"), if one shopkeeper were to start saying "So sorry to trouble you, but do you suppose you could possibly pay twelve pounds and forty-five pence for that, please?", his customers would be more likely to assume that he was making fun of them, an impolite move, than that he was being polite.

Although the seeds of this idea can be discerned in Brown and Levinson, it plays a minor role in their theory and is often entirely disregarded by their followers; by giving frequency much greater importance than semantic meaning Terkourafi ends up with a system that functions very differently from that of Brown and Levinson.

Terkourafi's framework was originally developed on a corpus of modern (Cypriot) Greek by a native speaker of that language; the other theories considered here were all developed by English speakers.

1.3 Watts

On the other hand Watts (2003) has proposed a view of politeness that, while in some respects very similar to Terkourafi's, is in one important feature its opposite: for Watts only that which is *not* usual (i.e., Terkourafi's marked politeness) should be termed "polite". What is normal and expected in a particular context should, he argues, be termed "politic behaviour" and distinguished from especially noticeable courtesy, or "polite" behaviour. For example, Terkourafi and Watts agree that in a community where shopkeepers always say "Have a nice day" to customers, and customers always use "please" when requesting something, these expressions are not noticed or remarked on – though of course their absence would be. But Watts, unlike Terkourafi, then argues that because only the unusual courtesy is perceived as polite, only these courtesies can properly be called "politeness" and form the subject of research on politeness. Like Terkourafi, Watts does not provide predictive generalizations for this (marked) type of politeness; each instance must, he believes, be considered on an individual basis. The result is that Watts provides no predictive generalizations about "politeness" at all. We can thus eliminate Watts's theory from our analysis already: it is not going to be of any help in understanding the polite request formulae in our corpus.

Nevertheless, a study with a different type of data might have found Watts' work more helpful. For example, Paternoster (2010) successfully uses Watts to illuminate historical politeness data from Italian (since the data contain explicit

reflections on politeness, something that Watts discusses). With our data we could, of course, consider the possibility that in Watts's framework the common request formulae are "politic" rather than polite; if we do that, Watts's theory might in theory yield essentially the same results as Terkourafi's. But Terkourafi is much more explicit on this point, since Watts does not clearly discuss the result of frequency in making certain behaviors politic and does not use quantitative methods in any of his analyses. Instead he discusses isolated examples that do not allow the reader to judge the extent to which particular expressions are frequent in specific contexts.

1.4 Hall

Finally, a much less well-known theory is of special relevance for our data because it was formulated specifically for Latin politeness. Jon Hall (2009: 8–15) has adapted Brown and Levinson's classification for the Roman world by proposing three categories rather than two (cf. a similar move by Jucker 2012). Hall's category of "affiliative politeness" is very similar to positive politeness, and his "redressive politeness" is essentially the same as negative politeness. To these he (Hall 2009: 13) adds "the politeness of respect (*uerecundia*)," which aims "to acknowledge a decisive social distance between writer and addressee" and is characterized by restrained and formal language; this category draws heavily on the work of Kaster (2005). Although Hall does not explicitly make this comparison, his *uerecundia* is very similar to Watts's politic behaviour. Hall faces an issue that is of less concern to the other theorists we have examined, namely sincerity. Romans sometimes used overtly polite language when engaging in serious conflict, and they also sometimes used polite language to express affection they did not feel. Since Romans officially valued integrity and sincerity, such politeness could backfire; for example after Cicero came into open conflict with Antony, Antony caused him severe embarrassment by publicizing an overly affectionate letter Cicero had written earlier.

2 Latin request formulae

The corpus on which these theories will be tested consists of polite requests in Latin letters.

2.1 Background

Though classical Latin was spoken about two thousand years ago, a great deal is known about it, for an enormous amount of literature survives. This literature provides us with a large body of Latin requests, mostly in drama (especially the comedies of Plautus and Terence) and letters (especially those of Cicero and Pliny the Younger). The works of all four of these authors have been extensively studied and as a result are well understood, so that it is usually possible to obtain reasonably detailed information on the relationship between the two parties to an interaction, the context of that interaction, and the exact meanings of the words used in the interaction.

Unfortunately, each of these four authors lived at a different time (Plautus in the third and early second century B.C., Terence in the second century B.C., Cicero in the first century B.C., and Pliny in the first and early second century A.D.), and Latin was continually evolving during and between their lifetimes. Although Pliny, the latest of these authors, writes in what is recognizably the same language as Plautus, the earliest, there are significant differences in the varieties of Latin used. Moreover, in modern times variations in politeness practice have often been shown to exist even within a single culture; it would be foolish to assume that even at one point in time all Latin speakers in the enormous Roman Empire used exactly the same rules of politeness. Social variation within Latin is widely acknowledged to have existed (cf. Adams 2013); it used to be claimed that regional variation did not exist, but that myth has now largely been exploded (see Adams 2007). In order to gain accurate information on something as precise and specific as politeness, it is necessary to concentrate on utterances produced by a single author, and under those circumstances the best source of information is the letters of Cicero,[2] which contain more requests than any other body of Latin written by one individual. (Some letters preserved as part of the Ciceronian corpus are letters to Cicero rather than from him; these have been removed from the corpus for the purposes of this analysis. Therefore, in what follows "Cicero's letters" should be understood to refer to all and only those letters that were written by Cicero himself.) Letters also provide good material for analyzing an ancient language because we know that the original addressee of a letter did not gain any extra-linguistic information from tone, gestures, etc. that are no longer available to us.

2 The English-speaking reader can best access this corpus via the bilingual editions of D. R. Shackleton Bailey (1999, 2001, 2002) published as part of the Loeb Classical Library series of Harvard University Press. The standard reference format for these letters, used below, employs the abbreviations *Att.* (= *Epistulae ad Atticum*), *Fam.* (= *Epistulae ad Familiares*), and *Q.fr.* (= *Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem*) followed by numbers indicating the book, letter, and paragraph.

Cicero was an important political figure in the tumultuous period when the Roman Republic was turning into the Empire. He was consul (the highest office in the Republic) in 63 B.C., when the revolutionary Catiline led an unsuccessful conspiracy against the government; Cicero was credited with saving the state on that occasion and never allowed anyone to forget it, a fact that clearly annoyed his contemporaries. Unlike Caesar, Pompey, and the ultimately triumphant Augustus, whose primary strengths were military leadership, Cicero's strong point was oratory; he was generally acknowledged to be Rome's greatest speaker and the best writer of Latin prose. Those skills were eventually responsible for his murder in 43 B.C. on orders from Antony, whom Cicero had attacked in a series of devastating speeches. But Cicero's vast literary output survived and remained an object of study and emulation without interruption to modern times: even today, students learning to write Latin are regularly told to imitate Cicero.

The letters range from brief notes to Cicero's close friend Atticus to lengthy official reports to the Senate; although some were written to face public scrutiny, many are private, informal documents intended only for the eyes of Cicero's wife, brother, or closest friends. They contain detailed descriptions of the political machinations and unrest that led to the end of the Republic, from someone who was personally involved, and as such have always been highly valued as historical documents. They were published after Cicero's death in several collections and rapidly became models for subsequent Latin epistolography; by the middle of the second century AD the acclaimed writer Fronto could comment that "nothing is more perfect than the letters of Cicero" (van den Hout 1988: 104 line 14). Although the letters were transmitted via copies made by successive scribes, a process that often introduces errors or even deliberate changes to the original text, the respect in which Cicero's style was held ensured that they were copied carefully and completely, without changes to the original wording. In the modern period Cicero's letters have been extensively studied and are central to our understanding both of late Republican history and politics and of the Latin language at that period; see for example the massive commentaries by Shackleton Bailey (1965–1970, 1977, 1980) and the frequent use of the letters in linguistic research by Adams (e.g., 1978, 2003: 308–347). They are thus an ideal example of a very well understood body of text.

Significant previous work on Latin requests includes that of Rodie Risselada (1993), who analyzed Latin directives from the perspective of speech act theory. Her results were based on a corpus of selections from Plautus, Terence, Cicero, and Pliny (Risselada 1993: 20 n. 31); although the selections are relatively short and therefore the corpus of data not as large as one might have hoped, her analysis is rigorous and her conclusions generally respected. Risse-

lada found that unlike in English, where it is usually considered rude not to say "please" or use an equivalent phrase when making a request, in Latin most directives were not accompanied by request formulae or indeed any type of overt politeness: requests could be expressed simply with an imperative without sounding rude (Risselada 1993: 155, 163; cf. a similar situation in modern Polish as explained by Wierzbicka 1991: 32–37).

Because we have so many Latin directives surviving, however, even the minority that make use of overt politeness markers constitutes a substantial body of data. In this group one can identify certain words and phrases that occur frequently and were evidently formulaic; in Cicero's day the most common of these formulae were *uelim* 'I would like', *quaeso* 'I ask', *rogo* 'I ask', *peto* 'I ask', and *oro* 'I beg', which together occur 661 times in his letters. (*Velim* is used 398 times, *quaeso* 64 times, *rogo* 99 times, *peto* 72 times, and *oro* 28 times. These figures include only occurrences with requests; some of these terms are also used frequently with questions, but those occurrences are not relevant – unless the question is itself a direct or indirect request, but that happens not to occur with these words in our corpus.) The usage of these terms is well understood.[3]

Risselada (1993: 254–255), without subscribing to any particular theory of politeness, argues that in general these terms are polite because they soften a request by making its fulfilment optional (1993: 250–252; Roesch [2004: 145–146] makes a similar claim about *uelim*), but that *oro* is not polite at all, rather urgent and emphatic. These claims can serve as a starting point for our examination, though of course they will have to be verified. We shall therefore start with the four terms generally agreed to be polite and consider what, if anything, can be learned from the application of each of the politeness theories described above; *oro* must be considered separately because it may not be polite at all.

2.2 *Uelim*, *quaeso*, *rogo*, and *peto* in Cicero's letters

To use Terkourafi's theory to understand *uelim* 'I would like', *quaeso* 'I ask', *rogo* 'I ask', and *peto* 'I ask', a considerable amount of additional information is required: we need to examine the frequency with which these terms are used in particular contexts before their politeness can be evaluated.

3 See Dickey (2012, 2015), Halla-aho (2010), Lech (2010: 87–117), Núñez (1995), Risselada (1989, 1993: 233–328), Adams (1984), Carney (1964), etc.

When this additional information is gathered, we find that all four of these terms are frequent with requests and that there are some distinctions in their usage: *uelim* and *quaeso* are used more often to intimates than to non-intimates, while *rogo* and *peto* have the reverse distribution, and *uelim* is most common with very minor requests, *quaeso* with slightly more onerous ones, *rogo* with major ones, and *peto* with the most burdensome and important requests (see Dickey 2012 for more information and evidence). In establishing the intimates/non-intimates distinction I have controlled for the greater frequency of minor requests in letters to intimates. There are also register distinctions among these terms: *quaeso* belongs to a somewhat higher register than the others and *rogo* to a somewhat lower one. Typical uses of these terms are illustrated in (1–4) below:

(1) *illud tamen quod scribit animaduertas uelim, de portorio circumuectionis; ait se de consili sententia rem ad senatum reiecisse.* (*Att.* 2.16.4, to Atticus)
'Nevertheless I would like you to pay attention to what (my brother) writes about excise duty on transferred goods; he says that he referred the matter to the senate owing to the opinion of his advisers.'

(2) *da igitur, quaeso, negotium Pharnaci, Antaeo, Saluio ut id nomen ex omnibus libris tollatur.* (*Att.* 13.44.3, to Atticus)
'So, I ask you, give Pharnaces, Antaeus, and Salvius the job of deleting that name from all the copies.'

(3) *ego te plane rogo, atque ita ut maiore studio, iustiore de causa, magis ex animo rogare nihil possim, ut Albanio parcas, praedia Laberiana ne attingas.* (*Fam.* 13.8.3, to M. Rutilius)
'I ask you plainly, and in such a way that I couldn't ask anything with greater earnestness, in a juster cause, or more from my heart – I ask you to spare Albanius and not to touch the estates that belonged to Laberius.'

(4) *magno opere a te peto ut operam des efficiasque ne quid mihi fiat iniuriae neue quid temporis ad meum annuum munus accedat. quod si feceris, magnus ad tua pristina erga me studia cumulus accedet.* (*Fam.* 15.12.2, to L. Paullus)
'I earnestly request from you that you try and make sure that no injury is done to me and that no time is added to my annual tour of duty. If you do that, a crowning glory will be added to your earlier efforts on my behalf.'

According to Terkourafi's theory, then, each of these terms is polite when used with the particular type of request to which it is suited, not because their lexical

meanings make them softeners but simply because of the convention that they should be used with such requests.

Brown and Levinson's and Hall's theories, on the other hand, suggest that we should look at the words' lexical meanings to determine whether and how they are polite. These lexical meanings, 'I would like' for *uelim* and 'I ask' for *quaeso*, *rogo*, and *peto*, are not completely easy to classify, but when added to a request such a qualifier might very well convey to the addressee that it was optional, as Risselada claims. Thus in Brown and Levinson's terms these would be elements of negative politeness, and in Hall's terms they would be elements of redressive politeness.

Such a classification, however, has some further implications. If these four terms are elements of negative politeness, *uelim* ought to be more indirect than the other terms, because stating that one would like something to be done makes compliance more optional than pointing out that one is asking the speaker to do it. So one would expect *uelim* to be used for somewhat more major requests, all else being equal, than the other terms. But this is exactly the reverse of the terms' attested usage.

A second set of difficulties comes with the implication that the four most common polite request formulae in Cicero's repertoire all express negative rather than positive politeness. First, it is often observed that Roman culture leaned more towards positive than negative politeness (cf., e.g., Risselada 1993: 92 n. 30; Dickey 2002: 94), so this result would make the request formulae anomalous in the context of Roman politeness as a whole.

Second, since in Brown and Levinson's view positive politeness is more likely to be used to intimates, equals, and inferiors, while negative politeness is more likely to be used to social superiors and to those distant from the speaker, Cicero in particular might be expected to prefer positive politeness. More than half his extant letters were written to close friends and relatives: chiefly his close friend Atticus, his brother Quintus, and his wife Terentia, who between them account for 53 % of the letters and 55 % of the requests using these four terms. (These three addressees do not, however, receive exactly the same types of request as others, as they tend to be cajoled less often with *rogo* and *peto* and more often with *uelim* and *quaeso* [for the details, see Dickey 2012: 742–744]). It seems surprising to have overwhelmingly negative politeness with the requests in those letters.

Third, Cicero had a very high status in Rome, being a former consul, and the effect on his language of this objectively high status would have been exaggerated by his unusually good opinion of himself. He believed that he had saved the Roman state from destruction by Catiline, and he thought this deed entitled him to constant honour from his fellow citizens. He did not consider

very many correspondents to be his superiors. If the vast majority of Cicero's polite requests use negative politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson's theory would make Cicero a far more humble character than we know him to have been.

One could conclude on the basis of this evidence that Brown and Levinson's theory (and by extension Hall's) does not work; the different elements that they claimed for negative politeness do not in fact go together. But there is also another possibility here: perhaps it is Risselada's explanation of the terms' function as markers of optionality that is the problem. A word meaning "I ask" need not *necessarily* indicate that fulfilment of the request to which it is attached is optional; instead it might emphasize the fact of the petition itself, which creates a connection between the two in which the asker is subordinated to the person asked, and flatters the latter. If that is the underlying logic of terms like *rogo*, they are in Brown and Levinson's terms elements of positive politeness and in Hall's terms elements of affiliative politeness.

If one takes *uelim*, *quaeso*, *rogo*, and *peto* this way, their usage fits perfectly with Brown and Levinson's framework. According to that framework positively polite terms should be used particularly to intimates and inferiors, and those are exactly the people to whom Cicero normally wrote letters – as noted above, 53% of his letters are addressed to his wife, his brother, or his closest friend, and 55% of the requests using *uelim*, *quaeso*, *rogo*, and *peto* are found in those letters. Many of the other addressees who receive these terms are clearly clients of Cicero's or in other ways his social inferiors; the pool of correspondents who could reasonably be expected to be targets of negative politeness strategies is far smaller.

But can the use of words meaning "I ask you" be explained as a positive politeness strategy? In the context of Roman social relations, it can. The networks within which Cicero operated laid great stress on the mutual obligations of friends, patrons, and clients. A great man was known by the number of people who supported him in gratitude for favours received or in hopes of favours to come; they paid court to him because he had the power to help them, and he in turn was obliged to use that power for the good of those whom he acknowledged to be his friends and clients (see, for example, Brunt 1988: 351–442; Deniaux 1993). In such a system the recipient of a favour was genuinely obligated to the giver; he had to repay it immediately with conspicuous gratitude and later, if he had the opportunity, by favours of his own. Therefore asking for a favour was no light undertaking; the asker put himself in a position analogous to that of a client and bound himself to future obligation if the request was fulfilled.

During the period to which almost all of his letters belong, Cicero's exalted status made him (at least in his own eyes) the ultimate patron. When someone of that stature asked a favour, it would have been an honour to be the person lucky enough to be asked; that fortunate individual would have the opportunity to put Cicero under an obligation to him, to enjoy his kind words and gratitude in the short run and to cash in the favour for something he himself needed in the longer term. Of course, not everyone shared Cicero's estimation of himself, so the reality of the addressee's perceptions may not always have measured up to this ideal. This matters little, however, as Cicero seems often to have been blissfully unaware of this gap in perception, and it is his own view of the social relationships involved that would have governed his use of politeness terms.

Thus by using terms like *rogo* and *peto* that unambiguously stated his request for a favour, Cicero was indeed pursuing a positive politeness strategy. *Velim* was less polite precisely because it was less direct; it did not acknowledge that Cicero was putting himself in the position of a client, and therefore it was not suitable for major requests.

The conclusion has to be that, despite its flaws, Brown and Levinson's framework has been useful in understanding the usage of these four terms: its predictive powers allowed us to uncover an error in our initial assumptions and reach a better understanding of what these terms meant. On the other hand, the extent of those predictive powers turned out to be more limited than is often assumed, for the lexical meanings of the terms under investigation were capable of interpretation either as positive or as negative politeness. Although Brown and Levinson seemed to offer the possibility of simply using a dictionary to understand the workings of polite formulae, that offer proved illusory: a careful examination of usage and an understanding of Roman culture were required to work out whether the terms in question were positively or negatively polite. Compared to this examination, the work needed to employ Terkourafi's framework was not significantly more onerous.

On this point, therefore, both Terkourafi's and Brown and Levinson's models were useful, but they led to different (though not unconnected) insights and were therefore complementary rather than competitive. Hall's theory was not meaningfully distinct from Brown and Levinson's on this point.

2.3 *Oro* in Cicero's letters

With *oro* 'I beg' we have a different situation, as the first question is whether the term is polite at all. Again, to apply Terkourafi's framework we need to look at how often and in what type of context *oro* is used with requests. The results

of such a look, though less clear-cut than for the other four terms, point in the same direction: *oro* occurs reasonably frequently in Cicero's letters with requests that appear from their contexts to be polite, and it is similarly used in his other works (28 times in the letters and 23 times elsewhere). Most of the contexts in which Cicero uses *oro* resemble ones in which he uses *rogo*, and in three passages (examples (5)–(7) below) he uses both together, making it clear that they can appear in exactly the same context:

(5) *te, mi Curio, pro tua incredibili in me beneuolentia meaque item in te singulari rogo atque oro ne patiare quicquam mihi ad hanc prouincialem molestiam temporis prorogari.* (*Fam.* 2.7.4, to Curio)
'My own Curio, I ask and beg you, by your unbelievable goodwill to me and by my own outstanding goodwill towards you, not to allow any time at all to be added to my burden as provincial governor.'

(6) *nunc, quoniam tuam iustitiam secutus tutissimum sibi portum prouinciam istam duxit esse, etiam atque etiam te rogo atque oro ut eum et in reliquiis ueteris negotiationis colligendis iuues et ceteris rebus tegas atque tueare.* (*Fam.* 13.66.2, to Servilius Isauricus)
'Now, since [Caecina], relying on your sense of justice, has decided that your province is his own safest harbour, I ask and beg you over and over again to help him in picking up the pieces of his old business, and to protect and look after him in other affairs.'

(7) *etsi egomet, qui te consolari cupio, consolandus ipse sum, propterea quod nullam rem grauius iam diu tuli quam incommodum tuum, tamen te magno opere non hortor solum sed etiam pro amore nostro rogo atque oro te colligas uirumque praebeas et qua condicione omnes homines et quibus temporibus nos nati simus cogites.* (*Fam.* 5.18.1, to T. Fadius)
'I myself, who long to comfort you, am myself in need of comfort, because for a long time I have not taken anything as hard as I take your misfortune; nevertheless I not only urge you vigorously but even ask and beg you by our love for each other to pull yourself together, show yourself a man, and remember the general condition of mankind and the times in which we were born.'

There is some debate about the interpretation of these passages, however: Risselada (1993: 255) argues that they do not show a similarity between *oro* and *rogo* because in them *rogo* always comes first and is followed by *oro*, so that "what is at first presented as a (polite) optional directive is subsequently "corrected" into an urgent supplication". Now it is true that the order of *rogo* and

oro is the same in all three examples, but these are all the examples of this combination that Cicero produced: with so small a corpus we cannot be sure that he actually had a consistent policy of putting one of these words before the other. Moreover the reverse order (*oro et rogo*) occurs in other authors, such as Marcus Aurelius (van den Hout 1988: 77 line 10) and Claudius Terentianus (Youtie and Winter 1951: no. 467.17); in those authors the meaning of the pair seems to be approximately the same as in Cicero despite the different order. And the conjunction Cicero uses to join these two words is always *atque* "and," which indicates co-ordination rather than correction. Therefore Risselada's interpretation is probably wrong: these passages indicate that *rogo* and *oro* were similar in meaning and usage.

Moreover, Cicero did not operate in a vacuum: many other Romans also used *oro* for polite requests. The term was growing in popularity during his time, and by the first century AD it was very frequent with polite requests, including hundreds of electioneering graffiti and dipinti at Pompeii, where *oro uos faciatis* ... 'I beg you to elect ...' was so universally employed (more than 300 examples are preserved) that it was usually abbreviated *o.u.f.*

Terkourafi's theory would thus lead us to conclude that *oro* was probably a conventionalized politeness expression when used with requests. Brown and Levinson's and Hall's theories, however, offer little help this time: a term meaning "I beg" could potentially express urgency (i.e., not be polite), or express negative politeness (if it indicated that the addressee had the power to refuse the request), or express positive politeness (if it expressed the speaker's admiration for the addressee's power and his willingness to subordinate himself to him).

Risselada's conclusion that *oro* is not polite, however, was not drawn without evidence. Her argument that *oro* is fundamentally different from the terms meaning "I ask" is based on two passages (examples 8 and 9 below) in which Cicero seems to make a distinction between *oro* and *peto* (Risselada 1993: 253–255):

(8) *peto igitur a te, uel, si pateris, oro, ut homines miseros et fortuna, quam uitare nemo potest, magis quam culpa calamitosos conserues incolumis uelisque per te me hoc muneris cum ipsis amicis hominibus, cum municipio Caleno, quocum mihi magna necessitudo est, tum Leptae, quem omnibus antepono, dare.* (*Fam.* 9.13.3, to Dolabella)
'So I ask you, or rather (if you let me) I beg you to save these people, who are unfortunate more because of fortune which no-one can escape than through their own fault, and to desire me to grant through you this favour

not only to my friends themselves and to the town of Cales, with which I am closely connected, but also to Lepta, whom I value above all others.'

(9) *quam ob rem a te peto uel potius omnibus te precibus oro et obtestor ut in tuis maximis curis aliquid impertias temporis, huic quoque cogitationi, ut tuo beneficio bonus uir, gratus, pius denique esse in maximi benefici memoria possim.* (*Att*. 9.11a.3, to Caesar)
'Therefore I ask you, or rather I beg and entreat you with all my prayers to give, despite all your great cares, a bit of time to this consideration too: how by your kindness I may show myself a good, a grateful, and a faithful man in memory of an enormous obligation.'

In both these passages Cicero suggests that there is a difference between *peto* and *oro*, and in the first he indicates that the use of *oro* might somehow be unacceptable to the addressee; as it is difficult to see how a term that enhances the politeness of a request could be unacceptable, this passage does appear to show that in Cicero's usage *oro* might not be polite, even in a context not noticeably different from the ones quoted above.

But Cicero elsewhere makes a similar statement (10) about the use of *rogo*, which everyone agrees is a polite term.

(10) *itaque te uehementer etiam atque etiam rogo, magis quam a me uis aut pateris te rogari, ut hanc cogitationem toto pectore amplectare*. (*Att*. 12.35, to Atticus)
'And so I ask you earnestly over and over again, more than you want or can bear to be asked by me, to embrace this problem for consideration with your whole mind.'

If *rogo* is polite, how could Atticus not bear its use? And what does it mean not to be able to bear being asked to do something? To take the second question first, such inability could of course be displayed in many ways, many of them rude, but if a valued friend asks one insistently to do something, the only effective way to stop him from asking while maintaining the friendship is to comply with the request: the person who cannot bear to be asked repeatedly caves in quickly under pressure. It is therefore likely that what Cicero meant when he said that Atticus could not bear him to make repeated requests was that Atticus always granted them before Cicero needed to repeat them.

To return to the first question, how Atticus could fail to tolerate the use of a polite term, the answer may lie in the type of politeness conveyed by *rogo*. We have seen evidence that *rogo* was polite because it put the asker in a posi-

tion analogous to that of a client, making clear his need for the addressee's greater power and undertaking to be bound by obligations in exchange for the help he needed. In most circumstances, it was clearly pleasant for a Roman to find himself being asked in such terms by the highest men in the land. But there were limits, because part of one's duty to one's closest associates was to be at hand for them, so that they were not reduced to having to beg for favours. For example, a Roman who allowed his father to entreat him for a favour, rather than granting it promptly, would have been behaving inappropriately. Thus to say that a particular person does not allow one to ask him repeatedly for favours is to praise that person's devotion to oneself – a type of sentiment that is fully in line with Cicero's attitude to Atticus (cf. *Att*. 12.3, 12.5a, 12.18, etc.), much more so than an interpretation that has Cicero complaining of Atticus' touchiness about his requests.

If indeed the words in (10) praise Atticus for being such a good friend that he grants Cicero's requests before Cicero has to make them twice, the same interpretation would work just as well for (8). The addressee there, Dolabella, had been Cicero's son-in-law until shortly before the letter was written; the two were never really intimate, but they clearly got along fairly well and remained on good terms for some time after their family affiliation was ended by Dolabella's divorce from Cicero's daughter. Under these circumstances, Dolabella might well have been expected to grant Cicero's requests without making his former father-in-law beg first. Dolabella obviously did not have the opportunity to do so in the course of the letter, as he would not receive it until the whole thing had been written. But Cicero's suggestion that he might not allow himself to be entreated with *oro* gave Dolabella the opportunity to, as it were, cut in between the *peto* and the *oro* and grant the favour forthwith, thus entitling himself to the same sort of praise that Cicero was giving Atticus in (10).

Thus it seems likely that although there was some distinction in meaning between *peto* and *oro* in Cicero's usage, the two were not opposites but rather allied: both were polite, and probably both were polite in the same way. Once again, a politeness theory has been useful in clarifying our understanding of the Latin; though this time Brown and Levinson's framework was not helpful, Terkourafi's allowed us to investigate politeness by using factors other than lexical meaning and thus to discover an element of polite usage that had previously been misidentified.

2.4 Requests benefitting the addressee

Sometimes the primary beneficiary of the fulfilment of a request is not the speaker but the addressee; the speaker benefits only insofar as he or she de-

rives vicarious pleasure from the addressee's wellbeing, and the requests are polite because they indicate that the speaker has enough affection for the addressee to get such vicarious pleasure. English expressions such as "Take care!" (when used as an equivalent of "good-bye") or "Have a great vacation!" fall into this category. Such requests do not necessarily use the same polite modifiers as the ones that benefit the speaker; for example "Could you have a great vacation?" is not a politer version of "Have a great vacation!" the way "Could you pass the salt?" is a politer version of "Pass the salt" (cf. Leech 2014: 180–186, 212–214). The reason is that phrases making fulfilment of a request optional only add politeness when the beneficiary is the speaker; when the beneficiary is the addressee such phrases simply weaken the affectionate concern expressed by the request itself.

In Latin this use of the imperative is very common; the epistolary signing-off formulae *uale* 'fare well' and *cura ut ualeas* 'take care that you fare well' are both examples. The five "please" equivalents we have been discussing can all be used with such addressee-benefitting requests, and when this occurs *uelim*, *quaeso*, *rogo*, and *peto* seem to follow the same hierarchy of magnitude of request as they do for genuine requests: *uelim* and *quaeso* are used for more minor requests and *rogo* and *peto* for more major ones. For example Cicero uses *uelim* to ask friends to look after themselves generally (*Fam*. 5.21.5) and to let him know what they would like him to do for them (*Fam*. 3.1.2); *quaeso* to ask Atticus to look after himself when he has a minor illness (*Att*. 16.11.3); and *rogo* to ask a friend to take courage in the face of serious adversity (*Fam*. 5.18.1). *Oro* is also used this way (*Q.fr*. 3.1.25). Most interesting are (11) and (12), in which Cicero uses *rogo* and *peto* to his beloved freedman Tiro to urge him to do everything he can to recover from a serious illness.

(11) *illud, mi Tiro, te rogo, sumptu ne parcas ulla in re, quod ad ualetudinem opus sit. scripsi ad Curium quod dixisses daret*. (*Fam*. 16.4.2)
'My own Tiro, I ask you this: don't spare expense in anything that is necessary for your health. I have written to Curio and told him to give you whatever you ask for.'

(12) *audio te animo angi et medicum dicere ex eo te laborare. si me diligis, excita ex somno tuas litteras humanitatemque, propter quam mihi es carissimus. nunc opus est te animo ualere ut corpore possis. id cum tua tum mea causa facias a te peto*. (*Fam*. 16.14.2)
'I hear that you are suffering in your soul, and that the doctor says that's why you're ill. If you have any affection for me, arouse from its stupour your interest in literature and your cultured humanity, on account of

> which you are so dear to me. Now you have to get well in spirit, so that you will be able to recover in body. I ask you to do that, not only for your sake but also for my own.'

It is notable that these addressee-benefitting requests generally follow the same distribution of terms to individual addressees that we have already observed; thus for example nearly all the passages of this sort in which Cicero uses *quaeso* are addressed to Atticus, Quintus, or Terentia, while *rogo* tends to be used to more distant acquaintances. Tiro, however, forms an interesting exception, in that these two examples are the only case of *rogo* and the only case of *peto* Cicero addresses to him. Cicero frequently makes requests of Tiro, but he never phrases any that are for his own benefit as strongly as the two that are on Tiro's behalf.

These addressee-benefitting requests, I believe, provide the clinching evidence for the real meaning of Cicero's "please" equivalents. If these terms had made fulfilment of requests optional, they would have been as unsuited to requests benefitting the addressee as English "could you ...?" is to "get well soon". But because they were elements of positive politeness, like the addressee-benefitting requests themselves, these terms were perfect for making such requests particularly effective. The requests to Tiro used *rogo* and *peto* because Cicero was trying to show his freedman that he cared so much about him that he would consider himself indebted to Tiro if Tiro did him the favour of recovering. Such an interpretation fits the contexts far better than one in which Cicero by using *rogo* and *peto* gives Tiro the option of not recovering.

3 Conclusion

This analysis has shown that politeness theories can be helpful in understanding even very well-known Latin expressions, even in texts that have already been the subject of intensive study over a long period. Of course, it does not show that politeness theories will necessarily be helpful in dealing with a given problem, but it does indicate that they are worth trying.

Despite all its drawbacks, Brown and Levinson's framework has some real advantages that allow one to attain genuine insight into particular polite usages, though it did not in this trial provide the easy shortcut that it is often thought to offer, since extensive scrutiny of data was required in order to employ the theory usefully. Terkourafi's theory was more consistently helpful than any of the others, but it provided very different information from that offered

by Brown and Levinson's theory and so did not supplant it. The apparent disadvantage of Terkourafi's theory, that it requires one to examine a large number of actual examples of usage for each term considered, proved not to differentiate it from Brown and Levinson's theory in this trial. Hall's theory was not meaningfully different from Brown and Levinson's on the points examined in this study, and Watts's framework was not helpful. While these results are clear for this set of data, it is worth keeping in mind that the different theories did not all have the same performance on all the questions investigated in this study, and when investigating different questions or data sets different results would be likely to emerge. Other politeness theories not investigated here might also prove useful.

In fact, the specific results for the four politeness theories are much less reliable than the more general finding that none of them can be simply applied as a template to tell us, without further effort on our part, how Latin politeness worked. Yet several of the theories have particular strengths that allow them, if judiciously applied in the context of careful examination of evidence, to enhance our understanding. As a result, the best results are achieved by applying several different frameworks to the same question.

The idea of using multiple frameworks seems to run counter to the very concept of a theory: on a theoretical level only one of these frameworks can actually be right. But since we cannot actually know for sure which one is right, there is something to be said for following the method that can be empirically demonstrated to be most useful, namely applying multiple frameworks.

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Bionote

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